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ABSTRACT

Noting that a child's peer competence and sociometric status not only are important indices of the child's current social functioning, but may also predict adolescent adaptation, this study examined the antecedents in peer competence and sociometric status in early and late elementary school years of five peer reputation dimensions. These five dimensions of adolescent peer reputation were: (1) aggression-inattentiveness; (2) achievement-withdrawal; (3) self-confidence; (4) sociability; and (5) emotionality-nervousness. Participating were 168 adolescent boys in The Netherlands. Two measurement waves took place in consecutive years at the beginning of elementary school, the third wave at the end of elementary school, and wave 4 when all subjects were in secondary school. Peer competence and attraction measures related to antisocial behavior, prosocial behavior, and anxious withdrawal. The findings indicated that antisocial behavior was relatively stable across the elementary school years and seemed indicative for increasing maladjustment during adolescence. Maladjustment was reflected in aggressive and disturbing behavior, as well as low orientation on academic performance and peer rejection. Anxious withdrawal was also relatively stable during elementary school. This behavior did not generalize to other domains of functioning, but the emotional and social aspects of anxiety-withdrawal diverged in adolescence. Peer rejection at the end of elementary school contributed to emotional instability in adolescence. Prosocial behavior in elementary school did not have any predictive validity for later prosocial or antisocial behavior during adolescence. (KB)

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Early Antecedents of Social Competence in Elementary School of Later Peer Reputation and Sociometric Status in Dutch Adolescents

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Introduction

The Revised Class Play (RCP), developed by Masten, Morison, and Pellegrini (1985), is frequently used as an index of the peer reputations of elementary school children. Factor analyses usually reveal three factors, representing broad reputation dimensions of peer behaviors. These dimensions are sociability-leadership, aggressive-disruptive, and sensitive-isolated.

In a recent study, exploratory factor analysis of the peer nominations of 2001 adolescents (mean age 14.5 years, 885 girls) on 20 items representing the Big Five factors, yielded five factors. The content of most of these factors resembles the RCP reputation dimensions. Aggression-Inattentiveness resembles the RCP dimension Aggressive-Disruptive; Achievement-Withdrawal is similar to the RCP dimension Sensitive-Isolated; both factors Self-Confidence and Sociability are related to the RCP dimension Sociability-Leadership; the factor Emotionality-Nervousness does not seem to have a RCP counterpart. The fact that five instead of three factors emerged in our study is probably due to the restriction of the items in the RCP studies to the interpersonal domain (cf. Scholte, van Aken, & van Lieshout, 1997), .

A child's peer competence and sociometric status are not only important indices of its current social functioning, but may also be predictive for the child's later adaptation in adolescence (Morison & Masten, 1991; Parker & Asher, 1987). The study reported in this poster presentation investigated the antecedents in peer competence and sociometric status in early and late elementary school years of the five peer reputation dimensions in adolescent boys.

Subjects and Measures

Subjects.

Subjects were 168 boys who participated in a longitudinal study, measured in four waves. Two measurement waves took place in consecutive years at the beginning of elementary school (T1: 1986/1987), the third wave at the end of elementary school (T2: 1991); wave 4 took place when all the subjects were in secondary school (T3: 1994).

Measures.

Peer competence and attraction

Three dimensions were distinguished in peer competence: antisocial behavior, prosocial behavior, and anxious-withdrawal.

Antisocial behavior at T1: peer- and teacher ratings, and observations on fighting; at T2: teacher and mother ratings on fighting

Prosocial behavior at T1: peer- and teacher ratings, and observations on cooperation; at T2: teacher and mother ratings on cooperation.

Anxious withdrawal at T1: peer- and teacher ratings, and observations; at T2: teacher- and mother ratings on anxiety and social withdrawal.

Peer attraction in each wave was measured using the probability scores of received peer nominations on the items 'who do you like most' (acceptance), and 'who do you like least' (rejection).

Adolescent Peer Reputations

Adolescent peer reputations were based on the five factors that were revealed by exploratory factor analyses on the peer nominations of 2001 adolescents. Peer nominations were not based on the Revised Class Play, but on 20 vignettes representing the Big Five personality factors (cf. Scholte et al., 1997).

The five reputation dimensions (with items in parentheses) were as follows:
1) Aggression-Inattentiveness: quarreling, lazy, unreflective, absentminded, irritable
2) Achievement-Withdrawal: able to concentrate, hard working, shy, reserved, withdrawn.
3) Self-Confidence: sensible, secure, cooperative, spontaneous.
4) Sociability: enthusiastic, considerate, intelligent
5) Emotionality-Nervousness: anxious, emotional, nervous, insecure, unintelligent.

Results

The hypothesized model (see Figure 1) did not fit the data, $\chi^2 = 454.8$, $df = 118$, $P = 0.0$). Significant improvement of fit was achieved in a number of steps. First, the correlations between the variables within the same measurement wave (psi's) were incorporated in the model ($\chi^2 = 114.8.$, $df = 87$, $P = 0.02$). Second, the relations between variables that indicated maximum improvement of fit were introduced in subsequent models, resulting in the final model, $\chi^2 = 86.9$, $df = 83$, $P = 0.36$.

Peer competence and attraction during elementary school years

Stability over a period of 5 years –between the beginning and the end of elementary school- was found for the three dimensions of peer competence, as well as for peer rejection and peer acceptance. In addition, antisocial behavior at T1 was significantly related to peer rejection at T2, prosocial behavior at T1 to acceptance at T2. At the same time, rejection at T1 was predictive for antisocial behavior at T2, and acceptance at T1 for prosocial behavior at T2.

Early antecedents of adolescent peer reputations and peer attraction

Antisocial behavior at T2 predicted Aggression-Inattentiveness but also Achievement-Withdrawal at T3, as well as rejection at T3.

Contrary to our expectations, prosocial behavior at T2 was not related to any of the peer reputations, nor to peer attraction at T3.

Anxious-Withdrawal at T2 was significantly related to Emotionality-Nervousness at T3, but not to Achievement-Withdrawal, as was expected.

Peer attraction at T2 turned out to be predictive not only for peer attraction at T3, but also for a number of reputation dimensions: rejection was related to Emotionality-Nervousness, acceptance was negatively related to Achievement-Withdrawal and positively to Sociability.

Finally, two competence and attraction dimensions at T1 were found to be additionally predictive for peer reputation dimensions at T3, 8 years later. Anxious-Withdrawal was negatively related to Aggression-Inattentiveness, whereas rejection was positively related to Sociability.

Discussion

The present study revealed a number of important early antecedents of adolescent peer reputations and attraction.

Antisocial behavior is relatively stable across the elementary school years, and seems indicative for increasing maladjustment during adolescence. This maladjustment is reflected in aggressive and disturbing behavior, as well as in low orientation on academic performance and peer rejection.

Anxious-withdrawal also shows a relative stability during elementary school. In contrast to antisocial behavior, however, this behavior is not generalized to other domains of functioning (e.g., academic performance), but instead the emotional and social aspects of anxiety-withdrawal seem to diverge in adolescence. It is the emotional aspect, and not the social aspect, that accumulates, resulting in anxious and nervous behavior salient to peers, but not necessarily in social isolation. Being rejected at the end of elementary school additionally contributes to this emotional instability in adolescence.

Surprisingly, prosocial behavior at the elementary school does not have any predictive validity for later prosocial (e.g., Sociability) or antisocial (e.g., Aggression-Inattentiveness) behavior during adolescence. Possibly, the behaviors that are perceived as prosocial during elementary school do not have this meaning when expressed in adolescence. In a similar way, the relation between peer rejection at the age of 6 to 8 years and Sociability in adolescence may be explained. Higher levels of activity, assertiveness or reactive aggression may be perceived by children as threatening, resulting in peer rejection, whereas these behaviors may be viewed in adolescence as socially adequate, and thus reflect adolescents' social abilities.

This longitudinal study, covering a period of 8 years, identified early antecedents of adolescent peer reputations and attraction, with four of the five reputation dimensions being related to early antisocial or prosocial behavior, or to anxious-withdrawal.

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Psi matrix for the variables within each measurement wave

1991

	Antisocial	Prosocial	Anxious Withdrawal	Rejection	Acceptance
Antisocial	.81				
Prosocial	-.39**	.83			
Anxious Withdrawal	-.15*	-.02	.95		
Rejection	-.11	.26**	-.10	.84	
Acceptance	.34**	-.31**	.11	-.32**	.85

1994

	Aggression-Inattentiveness	Achievement-Withdrawal	Self-Confidence	Sociability	Emotionality-Nervousness	Rejection	Acceptance
Aggression-Inattentiveness	.81						
Achievement-Withdrawal	-.30**	.89					
Self-Confidence	.06	-.03	1.00				
Sociability	.06	.01	.24**	.86			
Emotionality-Nervousness	.14*	.37**	-.15	-.04	.92		
Rejection	.37**	-.03	-.07	-.09	.17*	.88	
Acceptance	-.06	-.08	.42**	.30**	-.12	-.31**	.86

Note: * : significant at $p < .05$, **: $p < .01$

Hypothesized Model

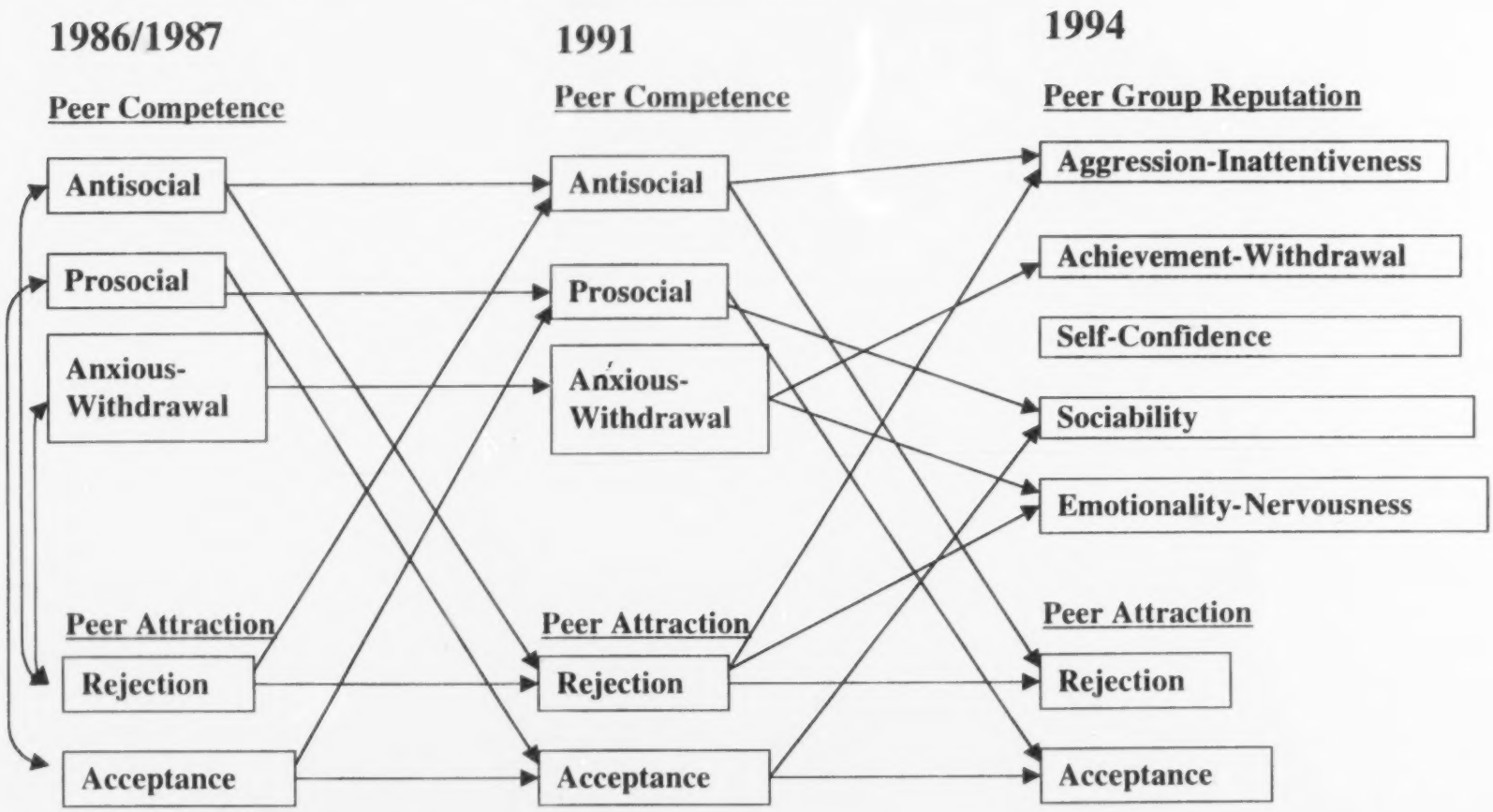
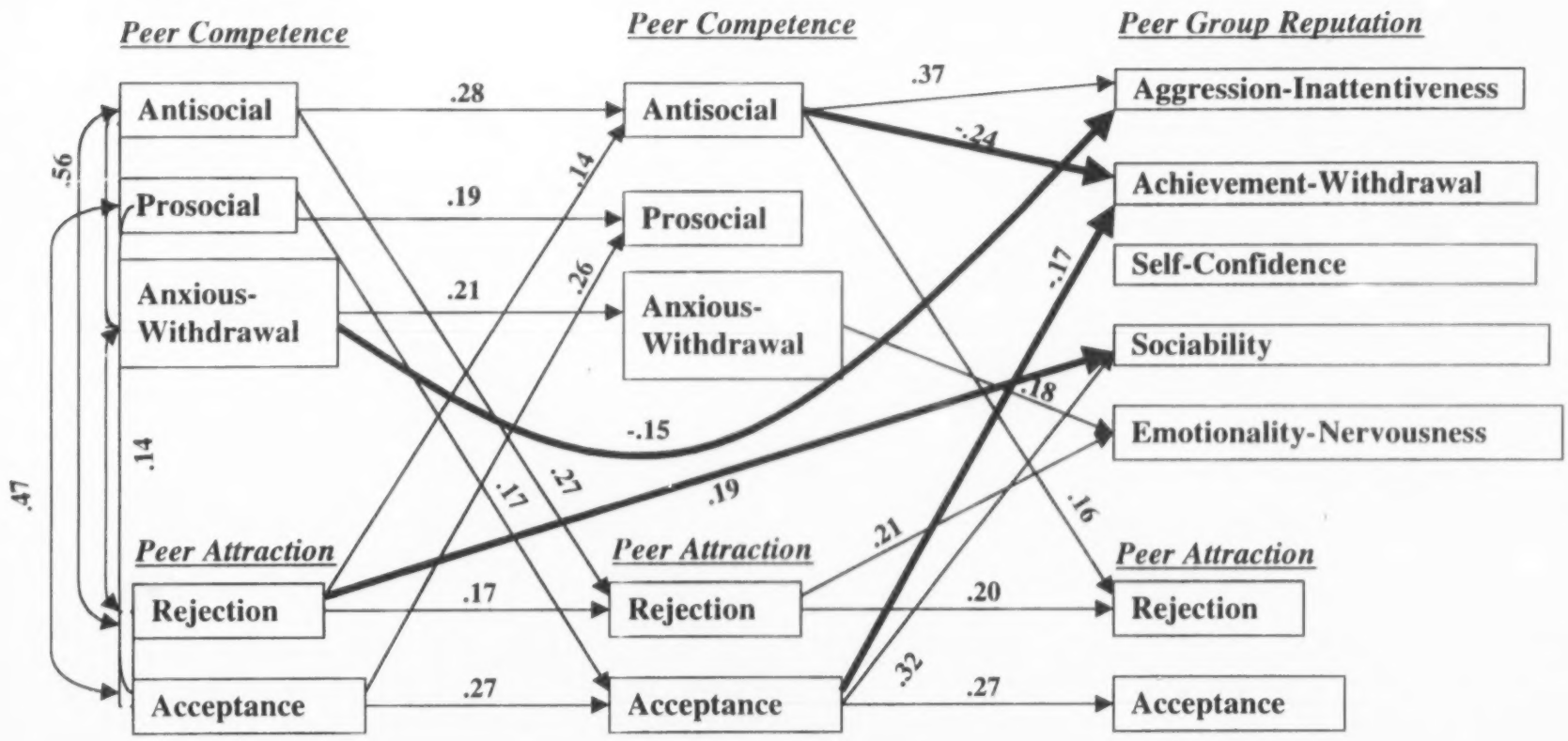


Figure 2 Final Model



Note: arrows in bold indicate additional relations compared to the hypothetical model.
Psi's between variables within the same wave are not presented in the figure

Chisquare with 83 degrees of freedom = 86.9 (P= 0.36), GFI = .95, NFI = .92, NNFI = .99